



FIRE FIGHTER

Volume 31 No. 3 November 2003

Yarl's Wood scandal continues



GENERAL SECRETARY

IT IS almost exactly a year since the Government vetoed the chances of a negotiated pay settlement with local authority employers. This disastrous move triggered the most serious industrial action the country has seen for years. Millions of pounds of wasted public money and six months later, we nevertheless came to a negotiated settlement. And it wasn't a million miles away from the one we were heading towards on that unfortunate November morning. Now, once again, it seems that forces are at work to undermine our efforts at gaining, through negotiation, fair pay in the Fire Service.

As you may know, the Pay Agreement accepted overwhelmingly by the Recall Conference on June 12 this year, required the National Joint Council to conduct detailed negotiations around the implementation of that Agreement.

Those negotiations have made substantial progress. The NJC Joint Secretaries set out in a Position Statement on October 20 the provisional positions reached and invited both sides to ratify them with a view to them being agreed formally in the NJC.

Employers had accepted them and following extensive consultation with members, the Union was on the verge of doing so too.

The Position Statement demonstrated the Union's commitment to all of the principles set out in the Pay Agreement and provided an opportunity to build upon the Fire & Rescue Service's reputation as the best performing public service in Britain.

But then, at the last minute, the Employers said they would not pay the full 7% on November 7 as under Stage 2 of the Agreement, but pay out 3.5% immediately and the other 3.5% later, backdating it to November 7.

This destructive eleventh-hour decision has been accompanied by a campaign of misinformation, if not plain lies, against the Union, reminiscent of the darker episodes earlier on in our pay campaign.

The worse accusation is that the Union has been misleading members about the Pay Agreement.

One of the pieces of evidence the employers have used to back up these false claims is an NJC circular, dated September 18. It said that "as happened frequently under the old pay formula, while the increases will apply in full from that date, they may not actually be paid until later." Now some slippage in some areas may occur, but that is a far cry from a deliberate plan to stagger the Stage 2 increase and link it to verification by the Audit Commission. Such a proposal was only announced less than a week before the November 7 agreement date.



ANDREW WARWICK/PA PHOTOS.COM

EMPLOYERS PLAYING POLITICAL GAMES

It is also important to expose the employers' disingenuous attempts to hide behind the Audit Commission in delaying the full 7% payment. It has now emerged that the employers, after months of detailed negotiations, only signed the contract for Audit Commission monitoring a day or so before the agreed payment was due. Moreover, in a letter to me in early October, the Audit Commission confirmed that it would not be making a recommendation as to whether the pay award should be made. For this was "a matter for the employers to consider individually and collectively".

Also, in October, following persistent rumours that individual authorities were planning a staged pay-out, I wrote to John Prescott, seeking clarification and warning that holding up Stage 2 would "threaten to totally undermine the reform programme" and "lead to considerable disappointment for our members who are expecting agreed payments under Stage 2 of the Agreement before Christmas."

Despite this golden opportunity to clarify the situation, the Deputy Prime Minister failed to make any mention of a staged pay-out.

It is very sad that the employers, with apparent Whitehall backing, insist on playing political games rather than honouring in full, agreements they have signed up to.

So how should we respond?



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As always in the FBU, the matter is one for the members to decide. By the time you read these words, you should all have received ballot papers at your home addresses.

On behalf of the Executive Council, I strongly urge all of you to participate in this consultative ballot and return your ballot papers by the closing date of 12 noon on November 28.

For the rest, I'll let the Executive Council explain:

EC STATEMENT, 10 NOVEMBER 2003

The Recall Conference on 12th June 2003 agreed the Pay and Conditions Agreement 2003.

Stage 1 has been implemented.

Stage 2 has produced a Joint Position Statement which has been agreed by the Fire Service Employers. The FBU's Executive Council have agreed that it could form an agreement for the implementation of Stage 2.

The Employers' decision to pay the 7% contained in Stage 2 in two stages albeit the second 3.5% backdated is, the Executive Council believe, in contravention of the June agreement.

The FBU's Executive have formally requested, following their meeting last week, that the Employers reconsider their position on this matter. The Employers have reconsidered their position and have no intention of altering their position on the staged payment of 7%.

The Executive Council believe that the FBU membership should now be balloted on whether the proposal made by the Employers to make the 7% payment in two stages of 3.5% immediately and 3.5% backdated, following verification and the conclusion of the outstanding negotiations, is acceptable to them.

If this proposal is not acceptable to the Union's membership, the Executive Council would organise a lawful ballot for further industrial action.

The result of this consultative ballot could be known in two weeks.



Andy Gilchrist



F B U C O N F I D E N T I A L F R E E P H O N E H E L P L I N E

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FAIRNESS AT WORK is about treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – with respect

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COVER PICTURE: PA PHOTOS

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING

A spin ridden government goes for 'quick wins'



Zero fire deaths is the only acceptable standard, says Assistant General Secretary Mike Fordham

THE MYTH that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's conversion during the dispute to an organisation that put at its core public safety and firefighter safety was exposed in a letter to all Brigades in England and Wales dated 10 June 2003. It stated: "Senior Fire Officers have argued that a number of 'quick wins' are readily identifiable in most Brigades; these will serve to launch the risk based approach to emergency cover".

So there we have it, the ending of national standards of fire cover and the introduction of a risk based system is to be launched. Not on a thought-through, well-researched, information-based assessment of public and firefighter safety and the protection of property and the environment, but on the need for a spin-ridden Government's requirement to achieve quick wins. Have we not seen this approach go so horribly wrong in Health and Education over recent years? Have we not seen this approach go so horribly wrong over Iraq?

The Union's Executive Council have agreed a strategy for responding to the Government's decision to pursue Integrated Risk Management. It is built around two strands of campaigning, one to ensure that such a policy is underpinned with a national standard or benchmark and the other that it is introduced in full and competently. The Union will act as the champion of risk assessment and will ensure that Fire Authorities and their advisors understand and carry out all their moral and legal obligations. With autonomy comes responsibility!

By the end of October the Union had completed a series of three-day intensive Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) training seminars for all Brigade Officials, IRMP Co-ordinators, Regional Officials and EC Members, which examine the key elements of risk-based IRMPs. Further seminars are now being organised to finalise individual five-year risk-based plans for each

of the 58 UK fire and rescue services in order that as a Union we are at the heart of the IRMP process. It is after all our members who are in the front line of all brigade activity aimed at driving down risk through intervention, prevention and protection. The FBU will be challenging the status quo of the existing 1985 Standards of Fire Cover, and will not allow Fire Authorities to take the simple option of opting for retention of existing mobilising arrangements. The Government's decision to end national standards of fire cover and the removal of Section 19, whilst intended as a threat to the Union, now presents us with a new opportunity. The opportunity is to challenge response arrangements and crewing levels in a way not open to us previously.

Prescriptive national standards gave to Fire Authorities a defence which will no longer exist. The Union is now working with our lawyers to examine these new legal opportunities, which will form part of our defence strategy to any proposals which put our members at risk. This will be tracked with a progressive strategy that challenges current crewing levels and ensures that levels of attendance at incidents are planned to meet worst case scenarios. Four or even three riders on a pump to a dwelling fire should never have been acceptable and in the future will not be. The new opportunities presented to the Union and its membership through risk management will be fully grasped.

The Union has been working closely with the highly respected Risk Management Consultants, Arthur D Little, in preparation for the second phase of our IRMP strategy, which will prepare officials at a local level to consider and respond to Fire Authorities' Draft Risk Management Plans, which should all have been published by the end of October 2003. This guidance will reflect the decision of the Executive that the status quo is not acceptable. And while taking on board all the requirements of risk assessment, it will place at its core public and firefighter safety. The FBU's position is that only one standard is acceptable - ZERO public fire deaths, and ZERO firefighter deaths and injuries.

To strengthen our commitment to public safety, discussions are taking place with the TUC to ensure that the 200,000-plus safety representatives throughout the UK are fully aware that risk-based emergency cover, if not underpinned with a national standard or benchmark, could compromise safety, endangering workplaces.

Quick wins, or even low hanging fruit, as others within ODPM refer to it, is one approach to risk management and emergency cover. The Union and its Executive Council has a very different vision for the future, the management of risk to ensure public and firefighter safety and to protect property and the environment.

One last sobering thought is that the current Fire Health & Safety Directorate now responsible for fire policy at the ODPM was previously at the Department of Transport which had responsibility for rail policy and safety. Was it a quick-win approach that led to the many rail disasters we have seen over recent years and has led to a Third World rail network in the UK?

■ *The FBU's national IRMP Department will continue to keep branches informed of progress through a series of newsletters to branches.*

AFTER THE PAY DISPUTE

FBU's fighting spirit lives on

A small battle in Gloucestershire shows the undiminished strength of the Union

GLOUCESTERSHIRE IS a small Brigade with four wholetime stations, one of which is day crewed, and a further 16 Retained stations. The local authority shouts, with pride, the fact that it is the second cheapest fire authority in the country, while we point out that the only reason that this can be maintained is the goodwill and expertise of the men and women who make up the service. Gloucestershire also has a high proportion of the Regional FBU Officials within Region 14. Phil Jordan is Regional Chair and Gloucester firefighter. We also have the Regional Vice Chair, Fairness at Work co-ordinator, B&EMM rep and Officers rep, and so although we may only be a small Brigade, the FBU is extremely healthy, with every single Wholetime Firefighter, every Officer and a high percentage of the Retained Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff being members.

Back in April 2003, Bro Phil Jordan was nominated for an Emergency Fire Appliance Driver (EFAD) refresher course, nothing unusual in that. It must be remembered that there is no requirement to attend a refresher course; these refresher courses are simply recommended to take place every three years. On the day of the course, the staffing at Gloucester was down to a level that had Phil Jordan attended this refresher then the watch would have been running on "minimum", a level that is manifestly unsafe for front line firefighters. On previous occasions when this had occurred the EFAD refreshers had been cancelled. This was to ensure adherence to the minimum safe crewing levels. So there was a definite precedent on this issue. Things then started to diverge from the norm. An officer was sent to Gloucester station to order Phil to attend this course. When Phil asked for his Union rep he was told that he didn't need a rep there and the order was given. Phil still refused to put his colleagues at risk by attending this training course. The health and safety of his fellow workers would undoubtedly have been jeopardised had he attended, so he stayed on watch. He was subsequently issued a Disc Reg 7 Notice of Investigation. This was during the latter days of the dispute and obviously our efforts were, at that stage, focused on the campaign. However, we continued to support Phil but reasonably thought that the investigation would be over quickly and that Phil would have no charges to answer.



Phil Jordan

Then came the 12th June and agreement on the resolution of the dispute. That is where, in my opinion, things changed. The membership and officials were at a low ebb, it had been a long and difficult campaign, with both sides taking some quiet heavy knocks. But the ODPM and the Employers thought that they had the upper hand and that we, as a Union, were no longer a credible force in the workplace.

The Gloucestershire Brigade Committee decided that to remain effective and to serve our members' best interests, which is after all our primary task, we needed to show the membership within Gloucestershire that we still had an effective role to play. This did prove difficult as morale was low and the uncertainty of the future made it almost impossible to predict where the next

attack was coming from or where we could strive for a real improvement in local conditions. So we were in a state of suspended animation while nationally negotiations continued and agreement was reached which would then allow us to improve, where we could, on these agreements. This is a position that many Brigade Committees found themselves in. We also had to get to grips with the small matter of Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP): a whole new language and system to learn in a very short space of time, or so we thought.

Then in August came the news that Bro Jordan had actually been charged with breaking the Discipline Regs by disobedience to orders.

The Brigade Executive met and decided to start a three stage campaign, this involved:

- Approaching management and attempting to get them to reconsider the decision of the Brigade Investigating Officer.
- Starting a petition, initially in Gloucestershire, then regionally and finally nationally to show support for Phil and seek to put pressure on Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) management.
- Initiating a series of watch visits to get the feelings and views of the membership. We are fortunate in that, only having four Wholetime stations, Control staff and eight Retained FBU stations, we can do this in just over a week.

This went very well, the membership were fantastic and it was soon felt by Officials that the rank and file were prepared to do whatever it took to defend Phil and this attack on an FBU Official. This had two effects. First, it gave great support to Phil and his family at this difficult time. But second, it also pulled the membership together and gave us all a focus, an issue that we could get behind in the knowledge that we were right to be doing this.

AFTER THE PAY DISPUTE

On September 4, the Brigade Committee agreed that unless GFRS withdrew the charges against Bro Jordan then we would ballot for strike action. For this decision to be taken so soon after the pay campaign was a magnificent result and the membership of Gloucestershire should be congratulated on backing Phil to this end. A further round of watch visits was organised to ensure that all members were kept fully up to date on an issue that seemed to change almost daily.

Then on September 12 another member of Gloucester station had a Notice of Investigation placed on him for very similar circumstances to Bro Jordan. This sparked off an immediate work to rule for almost 24 hours.

This took GFRS management totally by surprise and an emergency meeting was called for Sunday September 14, when the Regional Secretary Tam McFarlane and I met the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO).

The DCFO agreed to look at the whole situation and take into account the mandate we had for a ballot and the ramifications for industrial relations in Gloucestershire. We agreed to meet some three weeks later after he had time to fully consider the decisions taken and taken guidance from a national level.

We had suggested that the return to work agreement could

As a Trade Union we are still there and we are credible and effective, but we can only be credible and effective when we are united

be used in this case to drop all charges against Phil Jordan and also to halt the investigation into Bro Phil Phillips.

At a meeting on October 10, the DCFO agreed to drop the charges against Phil Jordan and stop the investigation against Phil Phillips.

So what have we learned from this whole episode? There are many lessons that we can take from this. That as a Trade Union we are still there and we are credible and effective, but we can only be credible and effective when we are united. As an individual you are at risk from over eager managers and a system that is based on the principles of military discipline. But together we can right wrongs

and ensure that our members are treated fairly.

Finally I have to thank the many people from all over the country who signed petitions and sent messages of support to Phil and Phil. I would like, on a personal basis, to thank Bro Tam McFarlane and Bro Brian Joyce for their help and advice on many occasions over the last few months and also to the Brigade Committee and membership of Gloucestershire who played a massive part in that old trade union adage of "An Injury to One is an Injury to All"

John Drake
Brigade Secretary Gloucestershire

RACISM AND RULEBOOK

CRE backs union expulsion of racists

THE COMMISSION for Racial Equality (CRE) has said it will back unions that expel British National Party (BNP) members. CRE Chair Trevor Phillips has offered to act in partnership with unions such as train drivers' Union ASLEF and public sector Union UNISON that have taken action against members involved in the far right party.

Unions believe that the BNP is conducting a campaign of infiltration in the hope of being able to claim compensation if its members are expelled. The Prison Officers' Association says party members are also trying to secure public positions of prominence within the public sector professions.

Attempts to fend off the BNP within the union movement have so far achieved mixed success. Last year, ASLEF expelled Jay Lee, a train driver who stood as a BNP candidate, but an employment tribunal overturned the expulsion.

ASLEF, which is to appeal, was deemed in breach of a section of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act, which made exclusion illegal unless "entirely attributable" to a

member's "conduct".

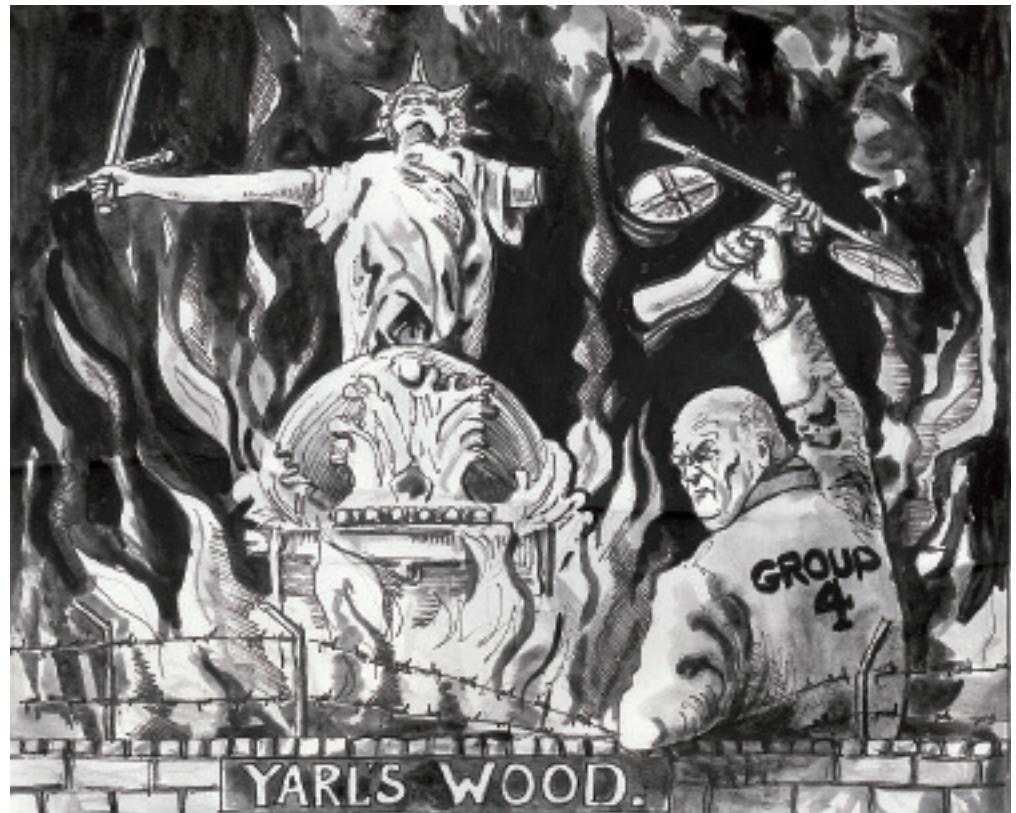
In June, an employment tribunal backed Unison when it rejected a readmission application from a BNP member Clive Potter, who was expelled two years ago. It is understood he intends to appeal.

Phillips, addressing the TUC said: "We will be prepared to work with and advise any union which takes the view, as I do, that no union branch should be forced to have racist as a member. If we need to put some legal support behind them, and we think it is a winnable case, we will do so."

He said the CRE had a solid legal argument for becoming involved. "It is our job to promote race relations. Anyone who is a member of the BNP is a racist. Anyone who gives money to the BNP is undermining good race relations."

Phillips also called on the media to present a more balanced picture of immigration. And he also encouraged employers to adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards racist employees.

**Emma Ginn of the
Campaign To Stop
Arbitrary
Detentions At Yarl's
Wood (SADY)
outlines the
background to the
campaign**



The nightmare continues

HALF of Yarl's Wood detention centre was destroyed by fire on February 14 last year. The Home Office had showed a total disregard for human life by detaining people at Yarl's Wood in unsafe conditions operated for private profit by Group4 – described in court as a 'national laughing stock ever since they first blundered into the field of private custodial services'.

The Home Office and Group4 should be prosecuted for unlawful imprisonment and recklessly endangering lives. Their responsibility for what happened at Yarl's Wood is significant. Firstly the Home Office arbitrarily detained people not accused of a crime, indefinitely – in a wooden framed building not fitted with sprinklers.

Then Group4 staff pinned a 51-year-old woman to the ground and dragged her along the floor, triggering the whole incident, which they went on to mis-manage grossly and negligently. They delayed access to firefighters and police and locked detainees into the burning building. As if this was not enough, they went on to hinder the defence of detainees singled out for prosecution. Group4 subverted the investigation process by a series of "wholly

improper" actions and the Home Office deported most of the detainee eye witnesses.

Group4 were under investigation for corporate manslaughter, and under threat by police of being interviewed about obstruction. Yet David Blunkett praised Group4, saying they acquitted themselves with "dedication and courage".

The bizarre case against those the company blamed for its own inadequacies failed miserably. Despite many feeling the cards were stacked against the detainee scapegoats, 12 out of 16 charges failed and there was no arson conviction.

HOME OFFICE RE-OPENS YARL'S WOOD WITH GROUP4

Instead of praising Group4, why does the Home Office refuse to confront the reasons why Group4 were investigated for corporate manslaughter? When things were shown to have gone badly wrong at its flagship detention centre, why did the Home Office seem to simply turn around and blame detainees, but not look towards its own immigration detention policy?

Even when private profit making Group4 turned around and

YARL'S WOOD

Short-changed on safety

ON VALENTINE'S day 2002 Yarl's Wood was razed to the ground.

Subsequent reports and court proceedings revealed a long list of worrying contributory factors.

Firstly, despite recommendations to the contrary from the Bedfordshire Fire Brigade, the building was constructed without a sprinkler system. This decision was presumably taken on the advice of senior civil servants attached to the Fire Inspectorate and was almost certainly influenced by considerations of cost.

Mr Prescott proposes that these same civil servants will have a central role in the new institutional framework for the Fire Service when the current White Paper becomes an Act.

Secondly, at the incident itself it appears that Group 4, a private sector company given the responsibility of running this Public Finance Initiative project, made a number of fire safety gaffes.

It is clear that the staff were not trained in fire safety matters and could offer the residents no effective assistance.

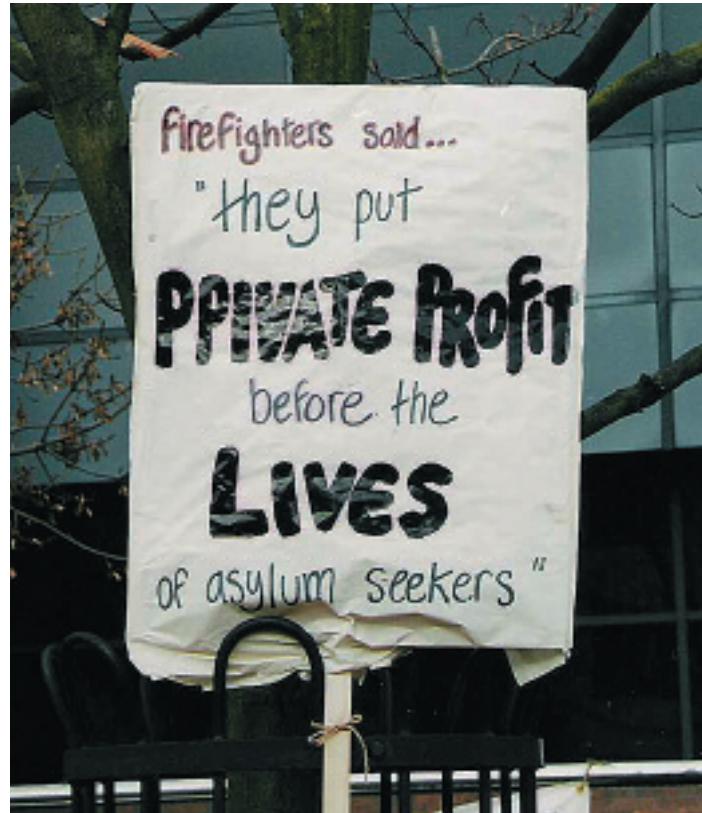
Remember that once the Fire Safety Regulations are introduced next Spring it will be the responsibility of companies like Group 4 to self assess fire risk when drawing up their fire safety plans.

And thirdly, because Yarl's Wood was built on Crown land, Crown immunity applied and normal fire inspection procedures were circumvented. And yet it appears likely that Crown immunity will be carried forward into the new Fire Safety Regulations.

Of course, the main conclusion to be drawn from this incident is that asylum seekers were treated as sub-humans. So the building was put up on the cheap, the staff supervising the inmates (for that is how they were treated) were untrained and poorly paid, and the exigencies of so-called Riot Control over-rode those of firefighting.

At every stage fire safety took a back seat.

Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary.



sued the Home Office for £97m, it continued Group4's contract to re-open Yarl's Wood! Is it that the Home Office intends to relentlessly criminalise asylum seekers whether it makes sense or not?

David Blunkett says: "The Government, and those agencies and organisations delivering nationality, immigration and asylum services, need to demonstrate that they know what they are doing, and that they are doing it well." Some say it is obvious they do not know what it they are doing.

We look to the inquiry by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman for badly needed clarification. The Home Office does not. It re-opened Yarl's Wood, with Group4, on 28 September – way before the publication of the findings of the inquiry – subjecting more people to the same regime and risks.

The UK is the only EU country to deprive children of their freedom through immigration detention. Yarl's Wood will predominantly be used for locking up women and children, none of whom will be accused of any crime. Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers said: "We did not consider that they were suitable places for lengthy detention, of anything other than a few days at most."

Who is in Yarl's Wood today? Many of the women are mothers separated from their children during war, many of them are rape victims, some whose torture wounds are visible. Some speak no English and do not understand at all what is happening to them. At least one has been detained for more than a year.

We still don't understand why Yarl's Wood was ever built.

STANISLAWO
TLEKOWSKI

"Human skills and ambitions have become the building blocks of successful economies and the self-selection of migrants means they are likely to bring valuable ideas, entrepreneurship, ambition and energy" says the Home Office.

When we need to increase immigration to sustain a stable workforce, why spend money detaining those migrants who chose to come to Britain?

Immigration detention is wrong, is not based on evidence and has no moral or economic basis.

Reach out to one of the women in Yarl's Wood. Speak out against what is going on – otherwise at some point we stop being innocent bystanders and become complicit in the process.

Come and visit detainees in Yarl's Wood with us – Campaign To Stop Arbitrary Detentions At Yarl's Wood (SADY) – 07786 517379 / sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk

Many thanks from our campaign and detainees to the FBU for such solid support!

STATISTICS – according to Home Office statistics, there were 26,585 asylum applications in the first six months of 2003. On 28 June 2003 there were 1,690 people in immigration detention, 80% of which were asylum seekers.

REASONS FOR DETENTION – Immigration use a 14 point check-list to decide who gets detained, but in many cases it seems the process is arbitrary. For example, an asylum seeker is given temporary admission and told to report back for an interview 48 hours later. The asylum seeker comes back 48 hours later and is detained, being defined as a potential absconder, despite the fact that they have just demonstrated full compliance to reporting conditions. A report by Sir David Ramsbotham, Chief Inspector of Prisons, found that even Immigration Officers themselves thought there was "little or no consistency or logic" in who gets detained. There does, however, seem to be a link to how many places are available in detention centres and prisons at any one time.

CONDITIONS – detainees are not accused of any crime and are detained with scant regard to judicial oversight – indefinitely. 21% are detained for more than four months. We know one who has been detained for 28 months and one who was detained for three years.

HOW THE GOVERNMENT MISLEADS THE PUBLIC ABOUT IMMIGRATION DETENTION – when Yarl's Wood opened in November 2001, the Immigration Minister said Yarl's Wood was for "failed asylum seekers" who would be held for "24 hours or so" prior to removal. The reality was that only 46 out of 385 detainees had an effective removal notice – many detainees had not come to the end of their asylum claim, some hadn't even had an initial interview, and many were later granted asylum.

WHO IS DETAINED – men, women, children, babies, the sick, the tortured, the disabled.

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE 2003



The FBU Fringe (Left to Right): FBU National Officer John McGhee, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka, EC member and delegate Dave Green, Chair Jenny Smith, EC member and delegate Mick Shaw, Unison's Malcolm Wing, plus other FBU visitors to the conference.

Unity bears fruit

THE STRENGTH of unity among trade unions around progressive policies for working people at the TUC Congress this year was continued into Labour Party conference. The "big four" – Unison, Amicus, GMB and the T&G – co-operated to defeat the leadership on foundation hospitals, employment rights and pensions, as well as to admonish it for the crisis of Britain's manufacturing industry.

Despite the best efforts of Health Secretary John Reid, delegates voted against a motion calling for conference to express support for "the efforts of this Labour Government to renew our NHS" by a margin of 56%-44%. Instead, they backed a Unison motion condemning this backdoor privatisation of the health service.

An Amicus motion, backed by Community Union ISTC, called for the Government to invest in industry and prevent more jobs being lost. It was tabled after a march, led by Amicus, brought 2,500 people – one for each manufacturing job lost every week in Britain – onto the streets of Bournemouth.

A TGWU motion criticising the Employment Relations Act, which places more limits on union action than any country in Europe, was passed unanimously.

Rather than be defeated on another vote, the leadership were forced at the end of the week to accept a GMB-sponsored motion demanding compulsory employer contributions to pension schemes of 10%. The Pension composite, which sees

compulsory contributions as a way of "eliminating poverty in retirement", was overwhelmingly supported by unions and Constituency Labour Parties.

DON'T MENTION THE WAR

To the anger of many Union and constituency party delegates, an emergency motion condemning the war on Iraq, put forward by transport workers' Union RMT, was ruled out of order. Nevertheless, as part of a wider debate, some speakers, Alice Mahon MP for Halifax included, took the opportunity to condemn the Government's invasion and occupation of Iraq.

However, in what could double the potential trouble for Tony Blair at the next conference, trade unions won a rule change so they and Constituencies can table four resolutions at future conferences, compared to the total of four allowed this year.

Unity among trade unions and many within the Labour Party was also seen at the fringes of the Labour Party conference, with the Iraq war and internal Labour democracy dominating the agenda, along with manufacturing, pensions and public services.

FORMER MINISTERS GO ON OFFENSIVE

The Tribune rally, traditionally one of the key events of Conference, saw an unsparing attack from former ministers on the Government's foreign policy of belligerence. Robin Cook, the former Foreign Secretary and leader of the House of Commons

who resigned over Iraq, pulled no punches, and set out three key points to restore peaceful international relations: an early transfer of power to the Iraqi people, restoration of the authority of the United Nations and telling the Prime Minister "No" if he tried to embark on a similar adventure. Clare Short, the former International Development Secretary who resigned from Government after the war had ended, criticised foundation hospitals, top-up university fees and the unilateral attack on Iraq without UN approval. And she stressed that "blind support [to the Labour leadership] to a mistaken loyalty is not a good policy," adding: "We have got to say that Blair has got to change or we have to change Blair." Alan Simpson, Labour MP, talked about three other types of weapons of mass destruction: currency speculators, the policies of monetarism and privatisation, and genetically modified crops

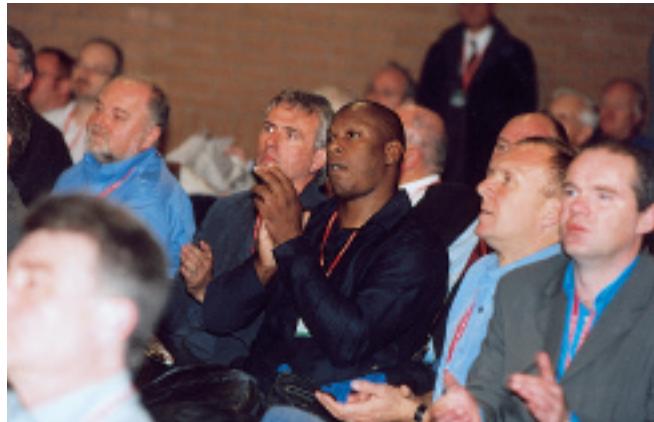
FBU FRINGE

At a fringe meeting, "Protecting Public Services", organised by the FBU, National Officer John McGhee sat on a platform together with Unison National Officer Malcolm Wing and PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka.

Mark Serwotka listed what seemed an unending series of problems faced by his members, from outsourcing and privatisation to the plans to move thousands of civil service jobs from some the most deprived areas of the South of England to the North. Slamming PFI in the civil service, he said: "We are ideologically committed to public services provided by the public sector". Mark told the audience about plans to privatisate the forensic science service, saying that there was "no place for profit in the detection of crime". And he condemned the hypocrisy of a Government that claimed that closing social security offices was about modernisation. "Modernising public services should be about access," Mark said. Regarding plans to move 20,000 public servants out of the capital, he pointed out that London has some of the poorest areas in the country.

John McGhee explained to the audience the issues around the pay dispute. He reminded them that "30k was not a king's ransom", but that despite a determined effort by the Government, FBU members have won a decent settlement while maintaining the Union intact for the battles to come. He warned that the "Fire Bill opens door to PFI in the Fire Service because it gives Government control over fire stations, fire engines and Fire Service property". John also slammed the Government's attitude to fire prevention, by saying: "Its like giving people an apple and closing hospitals at the same time". And he urged Labour Party members and trade unionists to work together at a local level to fight attempts, under IRMPs, to make cuts in the Fire Service.

Unison's Malcolm Wing stressed the need to find ways of joint campaigning on other issues in the public services. And he argued that it was time for unions to go on the offensive, highlighting the fantastic job done by their members.



FBU delegates (Left to Right), Dave Green, Michael Nicholas and Mick Shaw – listen attentively

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist, who was unable to attend the FBU fringe as he had to return from Conference early to continue pay talks, did manage to make a earlier meeting organised by the Institute of Employment Rights, where he shared a platform with TGWU General Secretary-elect Tony Woodley and John McDonnell MP. All three condemned the Government's poor record on workers' rights and looked at ways of promoting them by co-ordinating trade union with Labour Party activity at a local level.

Andy spent much of his speech explaining the pay dispute and the continuing battles the Union is fighting to defend the rights of workers in the Fire Service. "I'm please I do hear that other public sector trade unions are intent on fighting this Government's attempts to so-called modernise public services," he said. "Just as they think they can impose their will on the Fire Service, they will seek to impose their will on other areas of the public sector." Andy also warned the audience about the Fire Bill and the attempts in the White Paper to undermine the role of the Union in the Fire Service. "The Government is determined to arm itself with every means at its disposal to see its will through in terms of the reform of public services."

Turning to the issue of pay, Andy said: "You cannot talk about modernisation of public services in the United Kingdom without talking about modernisation of the dreadful pay and conditions that people work under. It just doesn't add up." And in a call for unity in action, he said: "We can learn about collaboration in the way we see that big business collaborates, and governments collaborate, because we need some collaboration."

Tony Woodley pointed to the positive changes to Employment law introduced by the Government, but said they were nowhere near good enough. "We have seen some changes that are clearly helpful. We've seen our Government make rights to recognition easier than it was. But it is not easy. It is the most difficult route to get recognition of any country in Europe. We've seen rights of recognition denied for people in companies of less

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE 2003



FBU delegates hand out leaflets for our fringe with gusto

than 20 people. We expect the Labour Government, not only to start to listen, but to start to act to repeal [the Tory] anti-trade union laws."

Tony added: "We need that legal pendulum to swing back. We are asking for a Charter of Rights from day one. Why shouldn't there be a level playing field for workers in their workplaces? We want the right to take supportive solidarity action. We want recognition for small firms. And yes we want the removal of that outrageous 8-weeks clause that's seen my members at Friction Dynamics treated so shabbily."

LIGHT AT END OF TUNNEL

"I do see some light at the end of a difficult tunnel," Tony added. "Even the blind can see that this is the most unpopular time for our Government. Even the blind can see that that unpopularity is stretching into all those other frustrations. Even this Government and even this Prime Minister, will do what's right to be elected and we've got to make sure we keep the pressure on."

And, he added: "It isn't about the big four it is about us as a family of trade union and Labour Party activists. We have to continue to build alliances and win friends and influence people out there."

John McDonnell MP, Chair of the Campaign Group of MPs and a great supporter of the FBU throughout the dispute, was optimistic that pressure from trade unions and within the Labour Party was already having an impact – if not on Prime Minister Tony Blair, then on Chancellor Gordon Brown. He argued that in Brown's conference speech, there were references to employment rights that had only come about as a result of the campaign, co-ordinated by the IER, for a Charter of Workers' Rights. And, John said, "we've pushed him into a situation where he's having to review PFI and its relationship with employment rights – that means he's having to look at TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations] again and it means also no matter how much they attack [Unison General Secretary] Dave Prentice with regard to the two tier workforce, they know they have got to confront that issue."

John then turned to what must be done, in his view, at a local level, citing positive examples of Union-Labour party co-operation around privatisation in his own Constituency of Hayes and Harlington. "The moral for working for the future: when we are divided we lose, when we are united between the socialists in the Labour Party and socialists in the trade unions and campaigners we win."

"We need a new style of working at a local level," John argued. "It's no good just meeting at the Labour Party and TUC conferences. We need a new style of working between trade unions, constituency labour parties and Labour MPs at a very local level. It means getting back to working with local Trade Union branches and Constituency Labour Parties on local campaigns."

"We can mitigate the disasters of New Labour by traditional Labour and socialist action on the ground. And that's what I urge. The link up at the national level is there. The link up at the local level is now critical."

RECLAIMING LABOUR

Efforts to "reclaim" the Labour Party at the Conference culminated at a Campaign Group rally, which relaunched the Labour Representation Committee. The original LRC was created in the early 20th Century to ensure working-class socialists were elected to Parliament. It eventually metamorphosed into the Labour Party.

Attending the meeting were senior party figures, including Union General Secretaries Kevin Curran of the GMB and Tony Woodley of the TGWU. The FBU's John McGhee made a contribution on behalf of the FBU. LRC Labour MPs include former Environment Minister Michael Meacher, Alan Simpson and John McDonnell. Tony Benn, the doyen of the Left, also spoke in support of the group, along with Mark Seddon, a member of the party's National Executive Committee and editor of the Tribune weekly journal.

The new LRC will initially focus on transforming the party's internal democracy. It will call for constitutional changes and demand a more inclusive approach to policy making. The aim is for Labour to generate a more progressive policy agenda.

Mick Rix, the outgoing General Secretary of the traindrivers' Union ASLEF, who has been a key figure in the LRC's establishment, said: "This is not a breakaway party of an organisation within an organisation. It will ensure that the current elite is not replaced by a new elite who are obsessed by management and fixing. The LRC will strive to guarantee that the party is once more fully democratic. Most importantly, we want to ensure that Labour achieves a third and fourth term in office."

B&EMM School welcomes new faces

THE B&EMM School 2003 took place as usual at Wortley Hall on the 10-12 October. As usual, it was another 'full house'. There were 72 students, five tutors, 13 guests/observers and a number of FBU officials. Two local hotels had to be used to accommodate everyone, which was a logistical nightmare, but it did not detract from a successful School.

FRI 10TH OCT.

Started at 2pm with the B&EMM National Chair, Paul Ahmed, officially opening the 9th B&EMM School. As October is the UK Black History Month, we had a session on historical black issues and people. This was in the form of a quiz and it got very competitive amongst the students! This led into a workshop on the lack of black history in the British education system in the past and even now. Dinner was at 6pm, and at 7.30pm we had a Q&A discussion on the recent Pay Campaign and Dispute. National Officer John McGhee and B&EMM EC member Michael Nicholas fielded questions from the students. There was also a presentation from London B&EMM. The School finished around 9.30pm.

SAT 11TH OCT.

Just after 9am we welcomed our first guest speaker. He was Aamer Anwah from the Chokah Family Campaign. The Campaign has been based in the FBU Region 1 office in Glasgow. Aamer spoke on the campaign for justice and also about asylum and refugee issues in Scotland. At 10.30am we split the school into 4 groups and had workshop based sessions on 4 subjects. These were; Media Stereotypes of Black & Ethnic People/ F.A.W & the

Fire Service/ FBU Structure & B&EMM/ Mixed Race & Culture Relationships. Leading up to lunch we also had a film presentation from Simon Green (sacked member from Hampshire) and Lud Ramsey (B&EMM Rep 13) on the Anti-Racism event in Manchester and the Respect event in London this year. After lunch we returned to the workshops until around 4pm. Our next guest speaker came from the USA. He was one of two black Chief Officers who were from the International Association Of Black Professional Firefighters (IABPFF) and visiting the UK for 10 days. His name was Gerald Simon from Oakland and his presentation was excellent and warmly received by all who were present. After some feedback from the earlier workshops, the School ended for the day.

SUN 12TH OCT.

Started the day with a tutors report on the School so far, followed by Carl St Paul giving the B&EMM National Secretary report. After a short break we had the B&EMM Honours & Achievements session where we acknowledged our members efforts and awards in the last 12 months. Our next two guest speakers followed. They were Curtis Maffett (IABPFF) & Linda Bellos (Equal Opportunities Campaigner). We presented all our guests with FBU gifts and it was a special moment to present ex-FBU Research Officer Philippa Clark with a gift and a donation towards the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Statue on behalf of B&EMM. National V-Chair Samantha Gordon closed the School at 1.30pm.

Another hardworking and worthwhile weekend with quite a few new members.

A great Comrade retires

TAM TIERNEY, Scottish Regional Secretary, retired in July of this year. Tam had served 31 years ending his career as a Station Officer in Calton Fire Station Strathclyde.

Of his 31 years service Tam spent 30 years as an active official within the FBU. Among his previous posts held were Strathclyde Brigade Secretary. He eventually went on to become the Scottish Regional Secretary at age 42, serving 11 years in the post, the last year as a member of the STUC General Council.

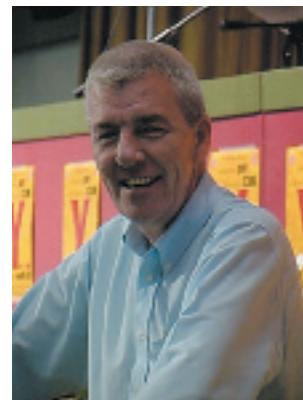
A committed socialist, Tam was the champion of many working class causes from outside of FBU circles, often representing people from his local pub in employment tribunals, disciplinary hearings and the like.

He was and still is actively involved in the struggle of the Saharawi peoples of Western Sahara, a region he visited in the late 1990s. In fact at his last regional meeting he declined any sort

of presentation to mark his service, instead requesting that any monies be donated to the Saharawi cause.

Tam will be missed by his colleagues throughout No 1 Region, where often his experience, writing skills and wealth of knowledge would be called upon during difficult circumstances.

However, we're sure Tam will still have plenty to keep him active in retirement, visiting his extended family in Crete, his continued support of the Saharawi, generally representing the underprivileged and disadvantaged of the working class movement and following his beloved Glasgow Celtic.



EQUALITY

Unions challenge pension

THE TUC has announced that it is to co-ordinate a Union-backed legal challenge to new Government regulations, which could allow pension schemes and religious organisations to continue to discriminate against lesbian and gay workers.

Seven of the TUC's affiliated Unions (including Amicus-MSF, Unison and the National Union of Teachers) have lodged papers with the High Court because they believe the regulations – which come into force on 1 December and which seek to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment and work-based training – are not being implemented as required by the original EU Employment Equality Framework Directive.

The unions argue that aspects of the Government's Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, which are meant to give lesbian and gay people additional legal protection, will actually end up discriminating against them.

The Union legal challenge is based around two key points of the proposed UK law – regulation 25 which relates to pensions

'This is a good law made less effective by two small but significant restrictions. If gay workers are to achieve true equality with their colleagues, the Government needs to scrap the offending clauses'

and 7(3) which affects people working for religious organisations.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "The Government's new sexual orientation regulations as a whole will make a real difference to gay people, giving them real legal protection at work for the first time. But it is unfortunate that the Government has decided to exempt those working for religious organisations and wants to bar lesbians and gay men from receiving benefits from certain pension schemes.

New rights for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual

FROM 1 December 2003 new laws will come into effect that will make it illegal for an employer to discriminate because of a worker's sexuality. As a result of a new European Union law against discrimination, the British Government has introduced regulations that for the very first time in the UK will protect LGB workers against being treated less favourably than their heterosexual colleagues. The new law, called the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, was agreed by Parliament in June 2003. Below is a short summary of what the new law will cover.

WHAT THE LAW WILL COVER

The new law will mean that the employer cannot lawfully

- refuse to employ someone, nor can they decide to dismiss someone, because they are lesbian, gay or bisexual;
- refuse access to training, or to promotion, because of sexual orientation;
- deny to lesbian, gay or bisexual workers the benefits (facilities and services) they offer to heterosexual employees (for example, access to insurance schemes, travel concessions, social events); the TUC understands that this should cover any benefits offered to an employee's partner (but see the marital status exemption below);

- give an unfair reference when someone leaves, because of being lesbian, gay or bisexual;
- victimise someone by treating them less favourably if they have complained about or alleged discrimination, or given evidence in such a case;
- discriminate indirectly. This happens when the employer sets out a particular provision, criterion or practice that everyone has to meet, but one group (e.g. lesbian or gay employees) cannot meet so easily.

The employer must act to protect employees against bullying or harassment suffered because of their sexuality. The perception of the person suffering the harassment is important in defining this;

WHO THE LAW WILL PROTECT

The new regulations cover:

- all employees and contract workers based in Great Britain;
- office holders;
- police;
- barristers and advocates;
- partnerships; and
- the armed forces.

The regulations also outlaw discrimination by trade associations (including trade unions), employment agencies, providers of voca-

discrimination

"This is a good law made less effective by two small but significant restrictions. If gay workers are to achieve true equality with their colleagues, the Government needs to scrap the offending clauses."

The unions argue that because regulation 25 will allow UK pension schemes to continue to discriminate in favour of married people (it says that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is not unlawful if it is done to prevent or restrict access to a benefit by reference to marital status), it amounts to indirect discrimination as gay people are not able to marry their partners.

Because most public sector schemes still only give benefits to married partners, and around a quarter of private sector pensions schemes do not provide pensions to unmarried partners, the unions are concerned that large numbers of gay and lesbian workers will continue to miss out if this regulation remains in its current state. The unions will argue that apart from a misinterpretation of the EU Framework Directive, the Government's proposed

regulation may also be a breach of the Human Rights Act 1988.

The other aspect of the unions' legal challenge relates to regulation 7(3) which allows for sexual orientation discrimination where someone works for an organised religion. Under the proposed law, employers will effectively be able to prevent gay, lesbian or bisexual people from working for any school, voluntary organisation, charity or private company with a religious ethos.

This exemption for religious organisations was absent from the draft regulations when the Government put them out for consultation at the beginning of the year. This change was made at the last minute, without any consultation.

The FBU national Gay and Lesbian Committee obviously welcome these changes within the law and continue to work closely with the TUC and affiliates on the exemptions primarily the one that affects Firefighters, which is the pension exemption

workers – the devil is in the detail

tional training, and institutions of further and higher education.

The employer will be liable for discriminatory actions taken by anyone acting on their behalf, whether or not it was done with their knowledge, unless the employer can show that they had tried to prevent such actions.

EXCEPTIONS

There are important exceptions to the ban on discrimination. The employer may

- deny a same sex partner access to a benefit if they specify that this benefit – such as an occupational pension survivor's benefit – is restricted to married partners only. The TUC has campaigned against this exemption;
- discriminate where there is genuine occupational requirement, which is a "genuine, determining and proportionate" reason for requiring the employee to be of a particular sexual orientation;
- discriminate if the employment "is for purposes of an organised religion" and a particular sexual orientation is required to comply "with the doctrines of the religion", or "to avoid conflicting with the strongly held religious convictions of a significant number of the religion's followers". The TUC strongly opposed this exemption.

There is a general exemption for acts done to safeguard

national security.

POSITIVE ACTION

The regulations make it legal for employers and trade associations (such as trade unions) to take steps to encourage persons of a particular sexual orientation to apply for particular work or training if this is to compensate for disadvantages otherwise suffered by persons of that sexual orientation.

ENFORCEMENT

Complaints under the new regulations will be heard by Employment Tribunals, (or by county courts where the respondent is a college), and have to be submitted within three months of the act of discrimination (six for a county court). The same remedies and rules will apply as for other complaints to such bodies.

The complainant may submit a questionnaire to their employer and the tribunal may draw appropriate inferences from a failure by the employer to respond.

The burden of proof lies on the employer to show that they have not broken the law, once a *prima facie* case has been made out by a complainant.

Source: TUC

INTERNATIONAL

Hands off Cuba,

The threat is real – trade union solidarity is needed more than ever, says Stephen Wilkinson, editor of *Cuba Si* magazine

CUBA IS once again under threat from Washington and its right-wing Cuban exile allies in Miami. In the wake of the occupation of Iraq there has been a growing number up of calls from senior US officials to bring 'regime change' to Cuba, and this is now part of George Bush's re-election campaign.

In the post-September 11 world, the US administration has made it clear that it is on a mission to eliminate all those that it claims are a threat to its security. After the occupation of Iraq, it is obvious that the US will not be stopped by international law or the UN from carrying out its plans.

It is in this context that Cuba now exists. Without a shred of evidence, Cuba was listed by George W Bush as one of those countries that were of 'concern' in his war against terror.

High-ranking US officials such as the US ambassador in the Dominican Republic have announced that the removal of Saddam Hussein was a 'good example' for Cuba. George W's brother Jeb, the governor of Florida, has called publicly for the US to invade the island and in Miami people drive around with 'Iraq today, Cuba tomorrow' bumper stickers on their cars.

Since its puppet military dictator Batista was overthrown in 1959, the US has stopped at nothing in its attempts to destroy Cuba's new society. It has launched assassinations and terror bombings on civilian targets including shops and hotels. It has even sponsored biological terrorism.

BLOCKADE STRANGLES ISLAND

And for four decades the US has strangled Cuba with an illegal trade blockade that has been routinely condemned by the UN. In the 1990s the blockade was tightened, hoping the collapse of the USSR would cripple Cuba.

Yet Cuba's unique social experiment has survived. Millions have visited Cuba and discovered not the police state of US propaganda, but a free-and-easy people, immensely proud of their



Isabel Moya Richards, director of FMC magazine Mujeres, at a Cuba Solidarity women's conference this summer

cultured and egalitarian society and the astonishing achievements of their health and education systems.

Having tried and failed using terrorism and economic strangulation, the US has resorted to a propaganda campaign to isolate Cuba as a 'rogue state' and construct a new pretext for invading the island and forcing 'regime change' – in other words yet another US puppet government.

Last year, Bush sent James Cason to Cuba as the new Head of the US Interest Section (de facto embassy) in Havana, with instructions to organise internal subversion.

Cason engaged in illegal political activities that, if carried out in the US by foreign diplomats, would carry a ten-year prison sentence. He travelled throughout the island, distributed money and equipment explicitly designed to build internal dissent, a clear violation of laws governing diplomatic conduct.

Cuba responded by arresting, trying and jailing 75 of its own citizens that were involved in Cason's groups.

Contrary to the way it has been reported here, these so-called dissidents were not jailed for expressing ideas or publishing papers, but for breaking Cuban laws that forbid collaboration with the United States.

States under threat never tolerate internal co-operation with the threatening state, and Cuba, having defended its independence for four decades, is no exception.

Mr Bush

A "CHARTER" of solidarity with Cuban women was launched at a recent conference organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign. The CSC Women's Charter of Solidarity was unveiled on September 13, at the first day of the Day Conference for Women, where two representatives from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) spoke.

THE CSC WOMEN'S CHARTER OF SOLIDARITY:

- 1 Increase information about the achievements of women in Cuba and the role of FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) in all our publicity, including the website, and produce a Women in Cuba pamphlet.
- 2 Explain the nature of democracy in Cuba, including the role of the FMC and the question of human rights for women.
- 3 Promote exchanges and visits for women between Cuba and UK, including Scotland and Wales.
- 4 Organise a women's study tour to Cuba in liaison with the FMC.
- 5 Encourage women in Trade Unions to communicate with and support women in Cuba, for example, by twinning.
- 6 Work with women MPs in England, Scotland and Wales to put pressure on the UK Government to oppose the US blockade and all aggression against Cuba.
- 7 Build links with women's organisations in Europe, MEPs and European Cuba Solidarity Organisations
- 8 Liaise with the Cuban Embassy and cultural organisations to invite visiting Cuban women to CSC organised meetings.
- 9 Develop our work and links with colleges and young people.
- 10 Promote Cuban women on International Women's Day (8 March) every year.

Source: Cuba Solidarity Campaign

The arrests of these so-called dissidents unleashed a storm of attacks on human rights in Cuba, including from the UK. Now, as a consequence it appears that the EU and the UK are moving towards adopting their own economic sanctions on Cuba – a move that has been criticised by respected figures throughout the political spectrum.

The fact of the matter is that Cuba's citizens enjoy more social and cultural rights than just about anywhere in the world. Cuba is a place where 95% of the population participate in peaceful elections. Where there are no death squads, or street children, or murdered trade union leaders as has so often happened in Latin America under US-supported 'democracies' and dictatorships.

Cuba, rather than being perceived as an enemy of human rights is seen by third world countries as a champion of their rights and the rights of the poor. In recognition of this fact it has just been elected unanimously to the UN Commission on Human Rights – despite a US and EU led effort to stop it.

Following the recent arrests there has been a call within the international trade union movement for the release of seven of the so-called dissidents who claim to be the leaders of 'independent trade unions'.

In fact, none of the so-called unions they supposedly 'represent' have any members never mind any branches in places of work. Their so-called organisations are nothing but a name on a piece of paper, concocted at the behest of the US Interests Section so that they might become a cause in the international trade union movement.

It has been said by some leaders of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions that the Cuban trade unions are not free of the state, that they have no right to strike and that Cuban workers are not free to bargain with their employers if they are foreign companies.

INDEPENDENT UNIONS

In fact all Cuban trade unions are financed by workers' contributions and are completely independent of the state. Workers do not have to belong to a union if they do not want to but all workers have the right to be represented by a union. Cuban unions do negotiate on their members' behalf with foreign

INTERNATIONAL



Alicia Gutierrez, member of the Foreign Relations office at the FMC (Cuban Women's Federation) at the women's conference



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employers and the right to strike has not been abrogated.

The Cuban trade union movement plays a fully independent role in representing the interests of workers, it has its own daily newspaper that frequently blows the whistle on cases of corruption and malpractice.

The contrast with the time of the Batista dictatorship could not be more stark. Back in the 1950s the Cuban trade union leadership was notoriously corrupt. General secretary Eusebio Mujal was personally responsible for anti-communist purges of the unions and complicit in the murder of scores of grassroots activists in the union movement.

It is no exaggeration to say that the situation in Colombia today, which annually receives millions of dollars of US aid, but where last year more than 180 trade unionists were murdered, is very similar to the kind of place Cuba was in the 1950s. The revolution of 1959 put an end to that situation. Since 1959, Cuba is possibly the only country in Latin America where no one has been murdered for being a member of a trade union.

As hundreds of trade unionists in the UK have found out by taking the time to go and see Cuba for themselves, their Cuban sisters and brothers share the same aspirations as they do for a better standard of living, and defending publicly owned services. They also have found out that in many respects Cuba outstrips our own Government in the provision of health care and education.

PREJUDICE AND HYPOCRISY

By making the effort to see through the barrage of prejudice and hypocrisy it becomes obvious to fair-minded people that it is the US, through its incessant attacks, that has persistently provoked the Cuban Government to actions that it would not have otherwise undertaken. By encouraging people to hijack boats and planes it is the US that has deliberately caused a situation in which drastic measures had to be taken.

For the US to criticise Cuba defies belief. Convicted black

murderers are fifteen times more likely to be executed than white murderers in the US. When he was governor, George W. Bush executed 152 people in Texas alone. The US imprisons children and others without trial in the US-occupied Guantanamo Bay. But such is the brute power of the US that Britain, the EU and other states are now threatening to punish Cuba.

Cuba is not a paragon of virtue, as any Cuban will quickly and freely tell you, but the Cuban people have created a humanitarian and egalitarian society, and one whose internationalism now sends more Cuban doctors to help third world countries than the World Health Organisation itself.

As far as the CSC is concerned, regardless of what one's views of the Cuban socialist system may be, it is beyond question that the Cuban people do not deserve the way they have been treated over these past 44 years. We call on all trade unionists in Britain to contemplate the enormity of the crime that would be committed if the bigots in Miami succeed in pushing for an 'Iraq-style' invasion of the island. It is time now for the British Government to be told once and for all – Hands off Cuba!

One way for FBU members to help the campaign to defend Cuba is to join Cuba Solidarity Campaign by affiliating through their Union branch, at an annual cost of £30, as urged by the FBU-backed motion at this year's TUC. Alternatively join individually for £15, and receive the informative quarterly magazine *Cuba Si*, regular updates on the situation in Cuba, a chance to join one of 30 local CSC groups, and special offers on merchandise, tours and events. CSC campaigns against the embargo and for Cuba's right to self-determination. For more information on its recently launched "Hands off Cuba" campaign call 020 7263 6452 or visit www.cuba-solidarity.org.

25 YEAR BADGES



Paul Rice, Cheshire, receives his 25 year badge from Steve Tottie



Terry Boffey, Sutton Coldfield branch, receives his 25 year badge from Steve Godward



Tony Scooby, Dubif Central branch, receives his 25 year badge from Steve Godward



Melvyn Ashley, Northwich Fire Station, Cheshire, receives his 25 year badge from Steve Tottie



Alan Jones, White Watch, Polmadie Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Kenny Ross



Alex Paterson, Red Watch, Polmadie Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Kenny Ross



Derek Hyndman, Red Watch, Polmadie Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Kenny Ross



Firefighter Jim Bassett receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Officers Secretary Pan Poullais.



Keith Cotter, Aberdare South Wales, receives his 25 year badge



Steve Bird and Steve Molson from F53 Tottenham Region 11 receiving their 25 year badge from Karen Pagan, Branch Secretary



Mal Dennison and Peter Townsend receive their 25 year badges from Branch Secretary David Atkinson



Richie Blacklee receives his 25 year badges from Branch Secretary David Atkinson



Phil Winn receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary Steve Harman



Firefighter Martin Ranson receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Officers Secretary Pan Poullais



Firefighter Gordo Rolfe receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Officers Secretary Pan Poullais



Billy Sanderson receives his 25 year badge from John Macintosh, Highland & Islands Fire Brigade



Jane Holmes, Berkshire control, receiving her badge from Cliff McFadden, BMS, on the Bracknell picket line



Marshall Spence receiving his 25 year badge on the picket line at South Shields from Paul Ahmed, Branch Chair



Tony Lensh, Stn 20 Reading, receives his 25 year badge from Cliff McFadden, Brigade Membership Secretary



Jim Paterson, White Watch, Calton Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Kenny Ross



Nigel Dix, Bracknell Branch, receiving his 25 year badge from Richie Hamilton, Branch rep



Bill Girdwood from Methil Branch in Fife being presented with his badge by Branch Secretary Dave Baxter



Joe Scott of Green Watch, Durham Stn receiving his 25 Year badge from Brigade Chair Dick Morton



Pat Burns, Blue Watch, Castlemilk Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Kenny Ross



Andy Millard, Stn 2 Reading, receives his 25 year badge from Cliff McFadden, Brigade Membership Secretary



Billy Lennox, Ayr, Region 1 receiving his 25 Year badge from Fergus Richmond Branch Sec



Pat Tyler, Torquay Fire Station Devon Reg 14, receives his 25 year badge from Mark Wileman (Torquay Branch Sec)



Ian Shakespeare receiving his 25 year badge from Paul Woolstenholmes, Brigade Secretary, Suffolk



Brother Andy Miller receives his 25 year badge from J. Mulholland Cumbernauld Fire Station



Brother Derek Stark receives his 25 year badge from J. Mulholland Cumbernauld Fire Station



Jim Hopkins and Spencer Bowen receive their 25 year badges from William Bowen